

Happy Are the Helpless & Hungry

Overcoming the Me-Attitudes – Part III

Matthew 5:5-6

Introduction

Jesus Christ is in the process of giving the believer the formula for happiness. And it is upside down from conventional thinking.

In fact, throughout His Sermon on the Mount, beginning in Matthew chapter 5, He will reverse the wisdom of the world.

- Those who come in last are first;
- Giving is really receiving;
- Dying is really living;
- Losing is finding;
- The least is actually the greatest;
- Being poor is becoming rich;
- Weakness is strength;
- Serving is actually ruling.ⁱ

“**Blessed are they,**” Christ will say nine times as His radical sermon begins.

The word “blessed,” from the Greek word “makarios,” can be translated “truly happy”.

And He began with this shocking statement:

Happy are the beggars . . .
(*Matthew 5:3 paraphrased*)

Literally, “Happy are those who recognize they are completely bankrupt in spirit.”

Why? Because they are the ones who are admitted into the kingdom of God.

Jesus continued to further turn over the apple cart of conventional wisdom as He said,

Blessed are the brokenhearted . . .
(*Matthew 5:4 paraphrased*)

In other words, “Blessed are those who mourn over their desperate condition, for they are the ones Christ will comfort.”

Now our Lord delivers another surprising step toward true happiness.

Happy Are the Meek

Look at Matthew 5:5.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“You gotta be kidding. The meek get buried into the earth – they don’t inherit the earth. Doormats are there to be stepped on.”

Matthew Henry, the Puritan pastor of the late 1600s, wrote that modern audiences recoil at this path to happiness. He wrote, “Common sense dictates that people who are meek will suffer insult and abuse, unable even to find some small corner where they can draw their breath – they are lambs among a pack of wolves; we know [by nature] that we must hunt with the hounds, because to be a sheep is to risk becoming someone else’s dinner.”ⁱⁱ

Most modern dictionaries will define the English word “meekness” along the lines of “deficient in courage,” or “one who lacks spirit and backbone”.ⁱⁱⁱ

My online dictionary defines it with words like, “docile; overly submissive; spiritless”.

This is like the kid who finally got fed up with having his lunch money taken away from him on the bus by the neighborhood bully. Every day, the bully demanded this kid’s dollar bill – which amounted to five dollars a week. But then, this boy saw an ad for karate lessons and got so excited – until he found out the lessons cost five dollars a week. So, he just went back to paying the bully.

It is easier to just pay up.

I read, just the other day, about the opposite response from a kid who was of a different stripe. This was a true story about a fifteen year old guy who was almost robbed in New York City. He was walking from the bus depot to his father’s apartment in upper Manhattan when he realized he was flanked by two young thugs. They pulled a gun on him and demanded that he hand over his wallet. He said, “No!”

They threatened him, “Listen, we’ve got a gun pointed at you, now give us your wallet.”

He said, “No way.”

The thugs tackled him and went for his back pocket, but he hung on hollering and fighting back until some people came to help and the thugs ran

away. One of his rescuers said, “They had a gun – why didn’t you just give them your wallet?”

He said, “No way, my learner’s permit’s in there!”^{iv}

In other words, “I’d rather die than not be able to drive!”

That is more like it.

The meek do not inherit the earth – they get ground into the earth.

The meek lose their lunch money and their driver’s permit – and everything else.

We would expect the Lord to say, “Do you want to be happy and on top of the world? Well then, you need to know that the powerful and well-connected inherit the earth!”

Instead, however, He says, “Blessed are the meek.”

But . . . meekness is weakness!^v

Ah, ladies and gentlemen, nothing could be further from the truth.

Meaning of meekness

The Greeks used this word translated “meek,” or “praus (πραυς),” in a number of interesting ways – which shed light on what Christ is talking about.

1. **First, the word was used to refer to a comforting fire in a fireplace.** When controlled, fire brings warmth; when out of control, fire brings destruction.
2. **The word was also used to refer to a gentle breeze.** Just the right amount of wind can sail a boat or cool down a hot afternoon; too much wind and we call it names like Hurricane Katrina, and it brings death and destruction and loss.
3. **The word was also used of medicine.** A patient struggling with a fever could be given medicine that was “praus (πραυς)”; that is, capable of relieving the burning fever and allowing the patient to sleep.^{vi}

What do all these things have in common? They are things that can be comforting and helpful if they are contained and experienced in the right amount, but too much, and they become deadly.

Meekness is not weakness. The truth is, the biblical idea for meekness is power under control; it is strength contained.

Meekness is having the ability to strike back, but resisting the urge to get even.

It is the power of Jesus Christ cleansing the temple with a whip, to defend the honor of His father. It is the silence of Christ before Pilate, unwilling to defend Himself.

It is not being defiant about me. It is not standing up for me. It is not defending me.

One author wrote, “Meekness is being done with me.”^{vii}

Meekness is dying to me. It is replacing the spirit of me-attitudes with the principle of beatitudes.

By the way, notice the promise again,

. . . the meek . . . shall inherit the earth.

The word, “inherit” is a future tense verb. In other words, the meek are going to rule the planet one day.

Now, think about the fact we do not receive an inheritance until somebody dies, right? In this case, it is we who die – we die to self, to our demands, to our rights, to our way, to our will.^{viii}

In dying to self, we find true happiness – because as long as we are living for self we never find happiness. But when we are finished with ourselves, we then are actually free to revel in the truth that one day, we will fully share in the inheritance of Jesus Christ.

This is the promise of Paul to the Corinthians,

So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours,

and you are Christ’s . . .

(I Corinthians 3:21-23a)

Happiness can become your spirit even when you have been stepped on and mistreated and abused and ignored. How? By recognizing that one day, because of your relationship with Jesus Christ you will rule the world.

Imagine this – the slaves of Christ will one day rule the world.

Evidently Paul thought this was a pretty exciting prospect.

Meekness examination

So how do we know if we are dying to self and developing meekness?

Let me give a pop quiz. We will call this a meekness examination. It has three questions.

1. Question #1: How do you respond when confronted with the truth?

The word “meek” appears in James 1:21, which reads,

. . . receive with meekness the implanted word...

In other words, when confronted by the word of God, the response of the meek is not to defend themselves, but to submit themselves to the truth.

2. Question #2: How do you respond when challenged about your faith?

Peter wrote,

. . . always be ready to give a defense . . . for the hope that is in you, with meekness and [respect];

having a good conscience . . .

For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

(I Peter 3:15-17 NKJV)

Here again is the nuance of dying to self rather than defiantly standing up for self. It appears as voluntary helplessness in the face of those who might grind us into the dirt.

Get a load of who wrote this – the apostle Peter.

- Out-of-control, sword-swinging, ear-chopping-off Peter.
- Talk first, think last Peter.
- Emotion under control? What fun is that Peter.

This should give us all hope – not only in the principle of meekness, but in the fact that the person who wrote the principle was Peter. Evidently Peter grew in meekness over the years, which means we can too.

How do you respond when confronted with the truth?

How do you respond when challenged about your faith?

3. Question #3: How do you respond when another Christian falls into sin?

Does your phone bill go up?

Are you leading the pack outside the city walls to gather stones for throwing?

Are you writing out your notes for the speech of your life?

Paul told us how to respond in Galatians 6:1,

. . . if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual . . .

[. . . get a club and let ‘em have it . . . oh, sorry...]

. . . restore him in the spirit of meekness.

This is a warm fire; a gentle breeze; just the right dose of medicine.

Perhaps you are thinking, “I’d like to do better on the next pop quiz. How can I develop more meekness?”

Before you write down ten ways to become more meek and buy a coffee mug that says, “I’m Committed To Meekness,” I have only one reminder – do not forget that meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, translated “gentleness” (Galatians 5:22-23).

We do not drum up meekness. The Spirit of God develops meekness – over a life-time, as with Peter – as we surrender to Him.

Let us cover one more way to overcome the me-attitudes.

Happy Are Those Who Hunger For Righteousness

Look at Matthew 5:6.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Is this the **objective righteousness** of God imputed to our account at conversion? It cannot be, for we already have this righteousness as a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

We have been declared righteous; that is, right with God.

Is this some kind of **social righteousness** in the just treatment of the poor and oppressed?

It could be . . . however, every one of the seven occurrences of “righteousness” in this Sermon on the Mount refer to **subjective righteousness**.^{ix}

It does not have to do with being right *with* God as much as it has to do with living right *for* God.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness has to do with passionately longing for living a life pleasing to God, and when God is pleased, we are pleased. Paul wrote,

. . . it is my ambition to be pleasing to God. (II Corinthians 5:9 paraphrased)

Our greatest happiness is in God’s happiness. Our greatest pleasure is in bringing God pleasure. What satisfies us most is in satisfying God.

Do you want to be truly happy? Both of these beatitudes clearly tell us that the way to be happy is to live for someone other than ourselves – primarily to live for God.

Jonathan Edwards, who pastored in the mid-1700s, wrote,

The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. [Family and friends] are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.^x

The paradox of this beatitude is that we are satisfied with that which makes us hungry. We are hungry for right living and satisfied in living it, which makes us only hunger for it more.

What does this sound like?

It sounds like Thanksgiving dinner to me! We are stuffed – we cannot eat another bite – we are satisfied beyond reasonable dimensions. A couple hours later, what are we doing? We are making a sandwich.

What does this prove? That we are gluttons! No, it proves we are alive.

The deceased have no appetite. The living do.

This is a beatitude, like all the others, for the living.

Proof that we are alive is the fact that we are constantly hungering and filling and thirsting and quenching our thirst – only to need to quench it again.

David wrote,

My soul is consumed with longing for your ordinances at all times. (Psalm 119:20)

The question is two-fold:

1. What are you hungry for?
2. How hungry are you?

Aristotle wrote of a time when one of his young students came to him and said, “Aristotle, you have wisdom that I so desire to have. How can I have it?”

Aristotle said, “You really want it?”

The young man said, “Master, I do.”

Aristotle then said, “Well then, follow me.”

He headed across the porch of the building they were in, out into the courtyard, and without

hesitating, walked directly into the pool of a fountain and water nearly waist high. The young man hesitated, and then thought, “Well, he said to follow him in order to find wisdom.” So, gathering up his robe, he climbed over the edge and waded after Aristotle.

When they were in the middle of the pool, Aristotle suddenly turned, grabbed the young man by the nap of the neck, pushed him under the water and held him there. The young man was thrashing about with his arms and kicking with his legs, thinking he was going to drown.

Then, at the last moment, Aristotle picked him up and carried him over to the side of the pool.

The young disciple was coughing and sputtering in shock and rage, but Aristotle ignored it all until the man got his breath. Aristotle then asked him, “Young man, when I held your head under water, what did you want more than anything?”

“Air, sir, air!” the young man cried.

His teacher then said, as he climbed out of the pool, “When you want wisdom as badly as you wanted air, you will have it.”

What do you want more than anything? Do you want to please God? And how badly do you hunger for that?

A starving man does not want food and a new car – he just wants food. A man dying of thirst does not want water and a new pair of shoes – he just wants a drink of water.^{xi}

Nothing else matters – we do not have to add anything to the list to satisfy Him.

Ask the average Christian, “Do you want to please God with your life?”

“Oh yeah – and I also want this and this and this and that.”

We are not quite famished enough for holy living. And our lack of hunger and thirst for righteousness becomes our greatest obstacle to true happiness.

So praying a prayer like this is entirely legitimate, “Lord, give me a longing to long for You. Give me a hunger to hunger after You. Give me a thirst that is thirsty for pleasing You.”

To these happy ones, God satisfies.

Conclusion

Let me rewrite these two beatitudes which enable us to overcome the me-attitudes.

Blessed are those who refuse to stand up for their own rights, willingly helpless as they refuse to exercise their power, even when it means they get crushed in the stampede of life, happy in knowing that one day, they will rule the world with Christ.

Happy are those whose primary appetites in life are living for God's pleasure – assured that God will satisfy them and deepen their hunger to grow and be filled, and grow yet more and be filled again, over and over – until perfected in holiness, completed with satisfaction in heaven, forever.

Let us sing:

*I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.*

*The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back.*

ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 33.

ⁱⁱ Matthew Henry, The Quest for Meekness and Quietness of Spirit (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996 ed. of 1698 ed.), p. 34.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Kingdom Living Here and Now (Moody Press, 1980), p. 77.

^{iv} Michael Hodgin, 1001 Humorous Illustrations (Zondervan Publishing, 1994), p. 96.

^v Warren Wiersbe, Live Like a King (Moody Press, 1976), p. 63.

^{vi} Ibid., p. 64.

^{vii} MacArthur, p. 85.

^{viii} Ibid., p. 77.

^{ix} Hughes, p. 40.

^x Heartcry!, Issue 26 (2003).

^{xi} MacArthur, p. 100.